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NIGHTSHADE

BY

CHARLES STEVENS REMINGTON



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NIGHTSHADE

By

CHARLES STEVENS REMINGTON

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Few hearken to the caws of grain-fed crow
While carols from the worm-fed lark o'erflow,
But many are at pains to grow the grain
And never on the worm a care bestow.

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THE MIRROR OF MNEMOSYNE

It was late in a day at the end of my life
That I sat in a wood out of turmoil and strife
Where the light was subdued by the shade,
For the leaves of a maple were laced with a larch
In an emerald fabric that curved in an arch
O'er a crystalline pool in a glade.

'Twas a wood where the shadows were trellised on gleams
And it promised rewards for the stalking of dreams
From their crevices carelessly strayed;
'Twas an hour when an errant afar from its cave
Might be lured to this nook in the water to lave,
And I studied the pool in the glade.

On the lining of moss in the richest of green
That embroidered the slopes with a shimmering sheen,
Lay the form of a beautiful maid;
'Twas an image to hold an observer in spell,
As she lay on her side like a delicate shell
In the depth of the pool in the glade.

She had folded her arms in the form of a nest
Where her face was concealed, but her virginal breast
Was so clear that I sat there afraid,
And her hair of the color of leaves in the fall
Had enveloped her waist with a gossamer shawl,
As she lay in the pool in the glade.

I arose in the hope of espying a trace
Of the maiden whose image was cast with such grace
That the picture in death could not fade,
But the light from the heavens that restfully shone
On the water convinced me that I was alone
By the side of the pool in the glade.

Then the ferns were caressed by the breath of a sprite
And the depth of the water was hid from my sight
By the ripples that plaintively played,
But the calm that ensued left the maid in her place
And I knew her at once as she turned her fair face
From the moss in the pool in the glade.

As my revery followed the path of the years
In a search for the hopes that were buried in fears,
It retreated until it was stayed,
And a wandering memory crept from the past;
From the distance it drew till I saw it at last
In the depth of the pool in the glade.

Ah, it seemed but a day since the maid on the moss
Had uncovered a pillow of satin and floss,
That in fold upon fold she had laid,
For the couch of her love, which the roseate gold
Of her hair was a glistening sheet to enfold,
Ere she passed to the pool in the glade.

On the word of her Christ that her love made her whole,
To her lips she entrusted her life and her soul,
And she gave in the spirit she prayed,
But her life was as fleet as the kiss of her breath
And it followed her soul to voluptuous death
In the depth of the pool in the glade.

She was still in her youth when her slumbering fires
Were ignited by God, for her flaming desires
In the highest of heavens were made,
But a man in the making is naught but a fool
And he left her to pine and her worship to cool
In the depth of the pool in the glade.

'Twas the form of the goddess of maidenly love
That I saw by the light from the heavens above,
But the soul was a seraph betrayed,
And I wept in my grief as I thought of the end
Of a life that the angels unfolded to blend
With the life in the pool in the glade.

Then a shadow fell full on her maidenly charms,
But it passed and she opened her beckoning arms
With a gesture I swiftly obeyed;
And I knew when we met, as the dead may divine,
That her love like her life had been riven from mine,
And I lie in the pool in the glade.

SEQUOIA

Within the fecund womb of earth,
A seed, it had no voice;
No wish nor thought it had of birth
But grew and knew no choice.

It lay at quiet in the dark
Below the world of storms,
Nor missed the wraps of bough and bark
But grew at peace with worms.

Allured at last from mother night
By gifts of rain and sun,
It drew itself toward the light
And smiled at life begun.

It saw the flowers of early May
And heard the thrush's lilt;
It saw the squirrels at their play,
The nests the partridge built.

It saw the flower die for the weed
And both die for the deer;
It saw the bird consume the seed
And starve another year.

In time it saw the eagle's flight
From mountain peak to peak;
It heard the noises of the night,
The puma's mournful shriek.

It saw the bird die for the bird
And screech put song to flight;
It saw the herd die for the herd
And beast hold beast in fright.

Four thousand years it braved the sleet,
The blast, the blow, the snow;
Four thousand years it breathed the heat
And fought to live and grow.

It saw the lightning's fatal flash
And met the tempest's pour;
Withstood the whirlwind's raving crash,
The thunder's deafening roar.

Its roots embraced a mountain place
As stout as half the world,
And from its mighty anchored base
By naught it could be hurled.

Four thousand years it looped its rings
While nations came and went;
And lived to lay a thousand kings
While creeds like reeds were bent.

It saw a race die for a race
And both die for a lie;
A god usurp another's place
And for another die.

From beasts and men and gods it grew
Until it reached the sky,
And from its height amid the blue
It asked a planet, "Why?"

When secrets of the stars it knew
The green of hope went brown,
And madness from the moon it drew,
Whence fell a silver crown.

Asleep at last, from struggle freed,
An outline black and blurred,
It dreamed it was a wasted seed
That went to feed a bird.

THE SUTTEE

So beautiful that I can feel you sleep!
And thus you slept until you made me bride.
So beautiful that I am loath to weep!
Ah, Love! This night, beloved of death, you died.

Across the court awaits the eager pyre,
And in the hour I go, a choiceless mate,
To place my hand in hand of lustful fire
That burns an universal love to hate.

Ah, Love! You came—a god congealed in ice
That thawed against my cheek, upon my breast—
A god that warmed and waked within a vise
Of molten flesh with fiery fiends possessed!

I found you in a cultivated close
And raised you from your pallet, undefiled,
Of pallid petals from the sexless rose,
To make our bed in brambles rank and wild.

My soul was on your lips, bekissed of mine,
And tongue of flame was shot to tongue of flame,
Until I lay—my love, my life, myself divine—
In coma that has never had a name!

I thought you only had the power of death
Until I found it joined with power of life.
Oh, Love! Oh, Love! When woman's quickened breath
Possesses her and then—the lightning's wife!

I was the anvil underneath your blows
That rang and rang and, ringing, left their scars
Until the heated, softened surface, rose
And pink, became the birthplace of the stars!

Embraced, enclasped, I strove to offer birth
To gods, and wove a plan, not woven in wombs,
To give through you all given me of worth,
But bore our biers in shadow of our tombs.

Ah, Love! 'Tis less than shell—'tis less than shade
Of her you knew who prostitutes the pyre:
Not even ashes that my lava made
Remain to make a jest with foolish fire.

But no! 'Tis endless chaos that I greet—
That would the phantom of my love entice.
My madness made the pyre, since all the heat
Of Hell was spent in melting Heaven's ice.



TO A HUMMING BIRD

Ever darting, stopping, starting,
Joyless, if at all, in flight;
Spending playtime after Maytime,
None has life so blithe and light.

Robes the brightest, cares the lightest
Ever worn by feathered folk;
Taste the sweetest, wings the fleetest,
Never you the echoes woke.

Flowers in cluster lack your luster,
Dainty, dancing, darting bird,
But we, listening for you, glistening,
Never once your carol heard.

Ever questing, never resting,
With the gayest you belong,
But the honey in your sunny
Spirit chokes the spring of song.

AN ARAB MAID

It was dusk in a desert oasis
Where the caravan camped for the night;
In this spot in the widest of spaces
Was a maiden apparelled in white.

By her side was a palm like a sentry
In an outpost afar from its tribe,
But in silence to one it gave entry
For he offered his love as a bribe.

Unrelieved by a season of dun days
Where the night was the cloud and the shade,
The retort of the tropical sun-rays
Had embosomed itself in the maid.

Like the hope that no hope can awaken
When but one is adrift on the sea,
Was her passion by passion forsaken
For it breathed of the breath of the tree.

As she danced in the eyes of her lover,
To his plea she was moveless and mute,
For she looked in her longing above her
Where the branches were barren of fruit.

* * * * *

It was dusk in another oasis
Where the caravan camped with the day,
But the noon of the desert's embraces
With the maiden had lingered to play.

From the circle of shadows around her
Came the music of wind through the palms,
And the voice, as the melody found her,
Was the voice of her love singing psalms.

When her thirst had discovered a water
Of a spring where a maiden could quaff,
Like the palms from which miracles wrought her,
She regaled and refreshed with a laugh.

Then the man disappeared with the moonlight,
But the maid was unmoved as he went,
And she lay through the length of the June night
With a lining of stars in her tent;

For she gazed at the languorous palm trees
As they leaned on the leaves of their mates,
And her bosom was cooled by a balm breeze
That was wafted through clusters of dates.



VIRTUE



A shadow speaks with vacant voice to chide
The faultless Hands, unseen upon the side,
That slide the film of love while shadows glide
Across my screen, that others may abide.



DEATH VALLEY

(*A Californian Landscape*)



Above, a ceaseless, cloudless sky—
Not blue but bleaching white—
Reflects the aching alkali
Till death suspends in night.

Below the level of the sea,
The plain lies torn and rent,
But, cringing, it can never free
Itself till suns are spent.

The mountains rear their roasting stones
Against the scorching sky—
The cracking skulls and crumbling bones
Of worlds long since gone dry.

A lifeless plant protects the gate
With needless, spiny knife—
A sentry, dead, but doomed to wait
And stab a phantom life.

Above, there soars no bird on wing
With beak that feeds on death;
Below, if breathe a creeping thing,
It breathes with poison-breath.

In other lands the green will sear,
The lakes and rivers dry,
But this commands the heights of cheer,
For, dead, it cannot die.



EGO ·



One love of loves is all I call my own—
A love that's worn a surplice and a stole
And sung my moods a soft and hopeful psalm.
Afar in northern cold and left alone,
I've wound around my life the woolen roll
Whose warmth was gentle through the awful calm
Of slumber, nearest death that love has known,
Amid the flocs and snows about the pole.
The only awning oft has been the palm
Of memory, when drifting sands were blown
And suns drove love to burrow with the mole.
If after all of snows and suns the balm
Of mercy soothe, and I must naught atone,
One love will then have borne above my soul.



THE CHALICE



There's a cup for my joy and my gladness
When life in its morn is yet early,
When, smilingly, Alice upraises a chalice—
A chalice all ruby and pearly.

There's a cup for my sorrow and sadness
When life has gone grey in its ashes,
When violet Alice upraises a chalice—
A chalice of starlets and lashes.

There's a cup for my frenzy and madness
When Fury enfolds and encloses,
When crimsoning Alice proposes a chalice—
A chalice of petals of roses.



LIFE



The swollen stream that breaks its banks in flood,
Collecting toll in treasure and in blood,
Deposits on the land its vital mud
Whence springs anew a wealth of blade and bud.

But I, who see the mote and not the beam,
Who have no light that sheds an inner gleam,
Who see no silt suspended in the stream,
Protect the plains that with the dying teem.

To me the dead and verdant look alike
And, knowing not whereat the flood may strike,
I build along the shore an earthen dyke
To turn the silt that feeds the ear and spike.

I see upon the flood a fallen tree
And, knowing not another tree 'twould be,
I labor blindly to enrich the lea
By guiding half the riches to the sea.



THE POTTER

She set her hand to make a shape of clay—
A fair and wondrous bowl wherein her golden soul
Could find repose till called on judgment day—

And, when her life to this attempt was bound,
With hand inspired and fine she gave to every line
The grace that in her limbs and breast she found.

When every art to which she might aspire
Was given to the bowl, she cast within her soul
And trusted both to chance of fickle fire;

But Fate, in looking on the burning bowl,
Decreed the time was ill and in the potter's kiln,
For too much love of beauty, burned her soul.

THE SAGE



To him who dwells in lofty solitude
Where frills and folds of Life cannot obtrude,
Where sounds are low and hushed and lights subdued,
Life comes; before him stands ashamed and nude.

As Life, undraped, abashed, before him stands,
Her shoulders bare between her silken strands,
Upon her flesh he sees the jailer's brands
And hides his aching eyes behind his hands.

AT PARTING

Madeleine: Here are we watching depressively
Flames in the grate as they kindle caressively—
Watching unhopefully, wearily, drearily.
Fond is the fire that is burning so cheerily—
Burning its heart with bravado and fearlessness.
Little it feels of the following cheerlessness.

See! Sap escapes from the log now and, simmering,
Plays on the flames as they, flickering, glimmering,
Whisper with lips that are moistened but amorous.
Vaporous drapery hiding the glamorous
Coloring falls and the flames that leap glaringly
See not the end of the log they eat daringly.

Cold are the flames that fly flashingly, flaringly;
Back of them see we the blackness despairingly;
Sharp as the cracklings are, hear we the dreariness;
Warm as the waves may roll, feel we the weariness:
Cold are the tongues that lap roughly but playfully;
After them sense we the dulness dismayfully.

* * * * *

Cradled in vaporous down, we are dreamingly
Floating above while this love of ours seemingly
Bears us along in the currents of yesterday—
Currents where, sporting, we flew in the quest of play.
Feel you the breaths of love fanning us airily,
Airily kissing, caressing us fairly?

There in our fancies again are we dallying,
Waiting and hoping the winds may be rallying
Forces that rest in the torrid but hidden isles—
Forces that sleep in the guarded, forbidden isles.
There in our fancies again are we tarrying,
Hoping the tempest a flash may be carrying.

There, where the vortex was velvet and ravishing,
Dust of the hurricane's lust on us lavishing;
There, where the winds were so hot and uproarious,
Wafting a warmth to the soul that was glorious;
There, where the kiss of the tempest was maddening,
Now is the void of the calm that is saddening.

Oft, when the currents were fondling us feelingly,
Brushing and touching, embracing appealingly,
Gave we no thought to the courses or reckoning—
Saw we no vacuums vacantly beckoning.
Thus, as the winds bore us wrongfully, rightfully,
Death is a witness, they bore us delightfully.

* * * * *

Madeleine: Here are we looking so fearfully
Into the dark while we fix our eyes tearfully,
Sadly, where once we saw coals glowing pleasantly—
Coals that in ashes will choke and die presently.
See you the light that was flashing so vividly
Flashes again? But it flashes now lividly.

I have had all of the flame and the flare of it,
All of the gleam and the glamorous glare of it;
You have had all of the blast and the blaze of it;
All of the fire and the rapturous craze of it;
Yesterday held and yet holds all the blend of us;
Morrow there's none—'tis the end, 'tis the end of us.

Looking in sockets so dull in their stoniness,
Gripping on fingers so white in their boniness,
Leaving the ash that no longer glows rosily,
Off for a grate that will always burn cosily,
Moving off vapidly, rapidly, glidingly,
Forth we go, down we go, dwelling abidingly.

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